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HB 5322: An Act Concerning the Creation of Human Services Permit and a Requirement That School Social Workers Conduct Home Visits During the School

I strongly oppose HB5322. This bill allows the State Department of Education to create a permit program for certain baccalaureate degreed individuals to perform mental health functions in public schools and mandates home visits by school social workers.

The pandemic has brought on an urgent need for more mental health providers to work within the schools. The acuity of the mental health needs of students requires the specialized training that only graduate or doctoral degree in a behavioral health field can provide. Even then current school mental health professionals struggle with the level of needs being exhibited by students. Allowing baccalaureate degreed professionals to provide mental health services with students conveys serious risk of doing more harm than good. In addition, the baccalaureate professional will require closely supervision which is time consuming and costly. I understand the level of need as a school social worker however, this bill it is not the answer. Preferably, expend funds by SDE to administer the permit program, better to apply those funds toward the hiring of more qualified mental health providers, such as school social workers that require a master degree in social work.

Section 2 of the bill would require social workers to make at least 2 home visits per school year to each student they work with. Honestly, this is an example of a lack of understanding of the environment and work of school social workers. Home visits are performed by school social workers as necessary, however an arbitrary 2 visits per school year is not in best interest of student, school social work, the school and the parents for many reasons. Home visits are time consuming and only necessary in limited situations. School social workers are constantly dealing with crisis in the school that require them to be in the building. For safety reason many schools requires two staff members for home visits, thus two employees will have to be pulled out from the school. Parents working outside the home will have to take time off to be present. Not every student will benefit from home visits. Each student's needs are individualized by the school social worker. School social workers have an incredibly busy school day mandating home visits will only encourage school social workers to find employment in other settings. Lastly, it will affect PPT meetings because of time restraint and will prevent social workers to participate, evaluate and report on students and might reflect on school social workers best practices.

I as a school social worker urge the Education Committee to let HB 5322 die in committee.